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### Once more, with feeling?

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Once more, with feeling? Site-specific interventions at Traquair House in the context of an expanded print practice.

Family portraits. Wallpaper. Books. Embroidery. Objects of symbolic value. So-called household pests, namely various species of moths. A miscellaneous, but mostly familiar list of everyday items and phenomena, some print-related, some not, that a visitor to an unfamiliar home recognizes. This is the case, even if her/his own interest in them may vary from none whatsoever to fleeting memories, intense emotion or longing and, in the case of moths, maybe even disgust. The objects in question all belong to what is now called 'the material culture of everyday life'. At Traquair, they are partly, if not exclusively, loaded with historical value in a more specific way than is generally the case for those owned or coveted by most visitors. This may be due to their age and hence rarity or otherwise material or symbolic preciousness.

Yet on this occasion, the objects do not appear in their 'original' form. They now differ from the way in which a visitor to a historic house normally encounters them. Nor are the objects presented in a manner in which we may choose to preserve and cherish such objects of our own. Here, these objects have become part of or even been subsumed by so-called 'artistic interventions', a project organised in collaboration with the owner of Traquair, Lady Catherine Maxwell Stuart, by the arts organisation, Edinburgh Printmakers.

What does such contemporary art practice, outside the more common gallery space, add to the experience of visitors to Traquair? The arts organisation which has commissioned the individual artists to create these new works is identified with the particular artistic medium of printmaking. It may therefore seem astonishing that the changes the artists have undertaken at Traquair have, at first glance, little or nothing to do with printmaking. Generally a print is perceived as a printed image, an etching, lithograph or screen print, mounted, framed and displayed on the walls of a gallery or home.

In which way is the work of these individual artists related to print or printmaking? What are the reasons for the popularity of installations and site-specific interventions in contemporary art? What do they allow artists to do and spectators to experience that more conventionally conceived art does not? How does the fact matter that these interventions occur in a historic site which functions within the economic and cultural framework of heritage?

These are the questions that will be addressed in this essay.

### **Material objects, heritage, history, art**

Material things are an important part of our lives and even have the power to shape us. Moreover, this power does not just apply to extraordinary things but even to the ordinary items in our everyday life. In addition to being integral to who we are, they also affect and mould our interaction with others, including our social position. Hence we need to conceive of objects not just as solid, in terms of the materials from which they are made, but also as changeable as to the meanings which we associate with them. Besides, these meanings themselves change depending on the context in which an object appears. Objects are therefore both tangible and symbolic. Recent academic studies speak of objects as 'performative' in that they are involved in and transformed by the many 'subtle relations' which happen around or through them.<sup>1</sup>

This fact that the meaning of objects and things is considered to be changeable through time and context ties them into a particular view of history. Some historians differentiate between notions of the 'past' and 'history'. In this view, the past serves as 'construction site' of facts from which meaning as a historical narrative is 'constructed'. In other words, our understanding of the past is not only changeable but also always shaped by present concerns and contexts rather than determined by facts, as conventionally assumed.

What is the implication for a historic site such as Traquair with its treasure trove of objects and spaces? Historic sites which are chosen for presentation to the public are deemed as particularly significant. In this sense, the place itself as well as the objects within it become performative. They are furthermore designed to communicate a range of ideas or specific meanings to their visitors.

In the context of the heritage industry, this representation of the past in three-dimensional form 'through the exhibition of intimate domestic life associated with significant historical figures or periods' combines a number of methods which appeal to 'memory, imagination, and intimate associations' of the visitors.<sup>2</sup> Such a presentation asks us, as visitors, to consider as to who lived, worked and died here and how they experienced this particular place. These questions remind us that there are different modes of being, different ways to experience the world around us and that this experience changed through time. In this sense objects of heritage can contribute to the shaping of our ideas about who we are and who we may become, both personally as well as in the wider cultural and social domain.

In the 1970s the idea and practice of heritage was criticised as merely stimulating a sense of nostalgia for a supposedly better past or, conversely, a reconciliation with present conditions in the form of relief that the present is not as 'bad' as the past. Current views of heritage acknowledge the economic overlap of tourism and heritage, but see it as less socially divisive and more able to question past and present alike.

In addition to stressing visitors' own interpretation of a site like Traquair, this dynamic view of heritage makes artists' interventions possible and meaningful. Current artistic practice often consists of a response to existing spaces and objects by re-presenting them in a multitude of different forms, be they established media like sculpture and photography or newer ones, like installation. Many artists today work in a manner which has been termed the 'post-medium condition'. Increasingly artists 'mix and match'

materials, media and formal processes which were previously regarded as distinct, even separate artistic disciplines, such as painting, sculpture and printmaking, for that matter. Since the 1960s, following Minimalism and Conceptual Art, painters began to produce videos, sculptors utilise painting and so on. The prevalence of installation art has further enhanced this trend, as an installation may incorporate not only elements of various traditional media but everyday objects as well. The most notorious recent example of such art in Britain was Tracey Emin's Tate Gallery installation *My Bed* (1999).

The reasons for the incorporation of everyday life into art are complex and to do with both culture at large as well the development of art in the last fifty years. Certainly one important factor is the desire on the part of artists to bridge the gap between art and life. Artists also wish to overcome what has been perceived as the elitist tendency of contemporary art. For similar reasons artists have also increasingly moved out of the gallery and produced work in which the artist responds emotionally, intellectually and practically to the distinctive nature of a place or 'site', hence the term 'site-specific' art. Again, the reasons lie in the intention of artists to engage with audiences outside of the gallery space which can be seen as class-ridden and exclusive and open only to those with insider knowledge. However, site-specific art does not aim to 'tell' an audience what to think or feel, but instead 'invites viewers to engage with the very real relationship between place and work' and 'to draw their own conclusions'.<sup>3</sup>

The mixing of media and the use of or reference to everyday objects and materials in the formation of art also applies to printmaking. This co-called 'expanded' print practice which interprets very freely what a print may be occurs alongside the more conventional creation of limited editions of individual or series of prints. At its most simple, a print entails the preparation of a matrix<sup>4</sup> which is then applied to another surface, or as one significant curator put it pragmatically and succinctly: 'We considered a print anything that had three components: a matrix, a transfer medium, and a receiving surface'.<sup>5</sup> The matrix in printmaking is the plate (in etching) or the stone (in lithography) or screen (in screen printing) with the image drawn or photographically copied by the artist. This

image is then transferred from the matrix to another support, usually a sheet of paper, by means of a transferring technique, often involving technical equipment, as with the printing press. The matrix as a material substance or carrier of the image is therefore crucial in allowing the production of multiple 'copies' of the initial image.

If the basic function of a print can be described in this manner, the discussion of the way in which objects function has shown that any object, any practice, any process entails a host of 'invisible' cultural associations and meanings. The individual artists' approaches at Traquair will serve to illuminate a much broader understanding of the meaning and role of print, in practical but also metaphorical terms.

## Artists

### **Lesley Logue**

Logue's reference point at Traquair are the 'Bear Gates', guarding the main access route to the house which have been closed as a defiant gesture since 1744 in support of the Jacobite cause. The reference to bears is a further allusion to the house's origins in the 11th century as a royal hunting lodge. This is illustrated in the fragments of a mural painting from the earliest part of the house. With her choice of animal, Logue also hints at historical changes to the landscape. Today's visitors to Traquair behold an environment which has changed immeasurably from the wild forests with their rich animal life, including bears, to a 'domesticated', agricultural and leisure landscape.

The implications of the specific procedure and model for Logue's piece have great significance. Logue, herself a practising sports archer, has not, for practical but also conceptual reasons, utilised the existing Traquair bear sculptures. Instead she has made a copy or cast of a three-dimensional realistic looking so-called 'target bear', one of many such reproductions of animals used in target practice by sports people. Logue's 'source' bear, despite being a reproduction, that is one of many identical ones, has nevertheless its own personal 'history'. Having fulfilled its designated function for fifteen years, the bear's 'kill -zone', i.e. the heart-lung area which, in a live animal, would allow

for a 'clean kill' of the animal – is pockmarked by fatal hits. This physical 'evidence' is faithfully reproduced in Logue's copy. Combined with the bear's humanoid upright stance and patient, even submissive expression, it creates the work's pathos despite the prop-like artificiality of a mass-produced object.

Aside from the specific meaning that the work elicits in the context of the house and ground, Logue's project seems at first glance far away from the idea of print or printmaking. However, processes and features that are closely affiliated with print can be detected in her piece. Not only is the 'original' bear a reproduction, but by casting it, she makes an exact copy of it. Moreover, this copy is then cast again! Logue's method is similar to the historical role of printmaking and its reproduction of drawings and paintings. It is this reproductive quality of print - and photography – which has caused printmaking's marginal position in art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially until the 1960s. Then there is the idea and practice of 'casting'. In fact, casting, which is in French referred to as 'empreinte' or 'imprint', can be regarded as a three-dimensional 'print'. In casting, as in making a print, a matrix<sup>6</sup> is transferred into an identical three-dimensional form by means of a transmission technique and materials, often involving technical equipment. In casting the transfer technique consists in making a negative mould from the 'original'. This is then filled with another substance that solidifies after which the negative mould can be removed and the new positive form (or copy) remains. (It is interesting to note that in the latest technology, casting is replaced by three-dimensional printing, a point to which I will come back later.) Casting or the imprint carries with it a haunting question: What (and where) is the original? In other words, the presence of the cast inevitably also implies an absence, namely the object from which it was taken. Hence there is an unsettling aspect to the cast which could be understood as a melancholic pointer to the absence of the original or the authentic. This takes on a particular meaning in the context of Traquair and the Jacobite cause. However, Logue's imitation and doubling of the bear target, using one of the oldest techniques of reproduction, casts [sic] much bigger questions as to the power and authority that we usually attribute to 'originals'. If the historical significance of the Bear Gates lies in their

symbolic defiance of the status quo, Logue's pieces could be regarded as political in a different manner. Their particular imagery or iconography as mass-produced objects entails a democratising aspect. This is reinforced by the seemingly pointless artistic reproduction. Why not just buy two bears, someone might ask. Logue's bears therefore could be said to direct a wry look at battles for political and social hegemony, which are often couched in the language of authenticity, and furthermore, remind us – playfully - of the potentially disastrous cost of such campaigns.

### **Helen Douglas**

Douglas has created a small artist's book for the Priest's Room at Traquair. Artists' books are closely affiliated historically with print in the form of the illustrated and printed book, although they go even further back to illuminated manuscripts. Often, but not exclusively executed through traditional or contemporary, digital, modes of printmaking, as in Douglas's example, artists' books have been produced and recognized as an art form in their own right since the late 19th and throughout the 20th century.

Although we generally do not think about it when reading a textbook, holiday thriller, a novel or the biography of a famous person, the book entails distinct kinaesthetic, sensory experiences and ways of looking. Its 'handy' size; its colourful and, in the case of hard backs, strengthened cover; the relative thickness and surface quality of the paper; its organisation of successive sheets of paper or pages; the graphic appearance of the design and distribution of the letters on the pages – they all force and enable the reader to use their body in very specific ways of movement and looking. Be it the holding, leafing through, gliding over, even caressing and turning, laying and smoothing of pages with arms, hands and fingers; be it the glancing, skipping, scanning, scrutinising of the page. Furthermore, chronology and time occur not only at the level of the content of the book, but are paralleled in the fanned and spread out pages, the changing duration of time spent with each page or sentence even and the speed or pace with which we move through the whole. Douglas draws our attention to these and other, often overlooked, so-called 'haptic'<sup>7</sup> qualities of the book as an object and our



interaction with it. She does this, first of all, by a careful selection of materials (papers and other materials, here actual pieces of fabric), printing methods, size and imagery. Additionally, her intensely layered imagery with its multiple references to the history of the house and its surroundings, symbolically laden details, such as items of devotion and artefacts, almost hypnotically meshes sensory with emotive and imaginative effects. The superimpositions and layering of fragments of photographic imagery parallels the printing process with its pre-disposition to such layering. For example, many screen prints may consist of several different layers of detail printed on top of one another to create the whole image. Such layering also becomes a metaphor for the physical as well as mental imprints of hands and eyes on the book and the book on its reader. Besides, Douglas's imagery mirrors the physicality caught up in looking at and handling the book by drawing attention to those parts of the body which are involved in our encounter with the book or which suggest touch. Her imagery consists of photographic details of hands and precious objects that are in close contact with the skin, like jewellery or handkerchiefs, all taken from painted portraits, often of women, at Traquair. These hint at the intimacy that a book establishes, the dialogue with the writer, here the artist, and reader or viewer. In the context of Traquair the book becomes almost a metaphor for the house itself which, according to French philosopher Bachelard, grants us intimacy, protection and bliss – at least up to a point!

Douglas's deliberately small-sized book, potently reminiscent of a reliquary and a souvenir, enhances this proximity to the body and especially the hand, but also alludes to the preciousness of historic books and more importantly, the ability and necessity to hide such a slight, but potentially lethal object in times of religious and political strife. The interspersed passages of texts from the archives of the house in addition to the imagery of objects and body parts and the display of the book in the so-called 'Priest's Room' intimates at this history as it played out at Traquair. A book's physical make-up carries with it metaphorical associations of inside and outside, surface and depth, openness and closure. These add yet another layer of meaning to both the general effect and power of books as well as their distinctive resonance at Traquair. Yet, there is

one more layer of hidden meaning or 'sub-text': There are frequent intimations in Douglas's texts and images of the domestic spaces that Traquair as a privately owned and inhabited house still represents. Historically and to a certain extent even today the domestic or private space is associated with the feminine. In that sense the book draws attention to another instance of the overlooked or secret, which is different from the specific historical secrets of the house, namely the hidden 'imprints' of labour, both physical and emotional, that women provided and which allowed men to function and be seen as the actors of history.

Douglas's intensely and pleurably tactile printed object also calls to mind the current crisis of the printed book which is caused by its relative dematerialisation through its increasingly digital form. The book's historical nature and crafting is tellingly referenced by Douglas through both imagery of leather bound spines and her book's material qualities. Pages not only represent photographically the tooling and embossing so typical of spines, but skilfully 'repeat' them through textured imprints on the actual paper surface. It is a revealing reminder of our need to touch and be touched, both by skin and eyes. Savvy technology companies recognise this and integrate tactility into their new products to ever increasing degrees. Douglas, in her turn, is no Luddite and fully exploits the possibilities of digital printing. Yet her book object, made from fibre and other organic matter, is an instance and evocation of a certain, older familiarity with things which continues to exist alongside and also meshes with newer, technically 'up-to-date' mediated life practices.<sup>8</sup> Such material imprinting goes beyond language and the visual at the same time as it contains them.

### **Duncan Robertson**

Robertson takes the domestic as his starting point. He 'steals', or 'appropriates', in the language of contemporary art criticism, already existing commercially printed imagery in form of mainly 19th century wallpaper designs as they can be found in various rooms of the house. In a manner that typifies the working method and ethos of many artists working today, in print or in other media (see Logue's piece) he recreates these paper

'prints' as printed textiles. He then literally frames his new 'prints' in the guise of embroidery hoops. Thereby he alludes to the similarity between both textile and interior design as well as the role of printed patterns as the basis for embroidery. Wallpaper is, of course, not just the inoffensive, merely decorative backdrop to the more important and representative items which define an interior space, such as furniture. The latter is regarded as having a vital role in fashioning and proclaiming the status and social value that characterise a historic house and its inhabitants. The same role applies to the seemingly straightforward print that is wallpaper. Its changing fashions, like the other more obvious pieces such as furniture, helps to create identity, for example, of wealth and sophistication and the often 'tacit', that is implicit, knowledge that enables the latter (what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called the acquisition of 'cultural capital'). Today such practices have been democratised in the context of consumer culture and mass communication. Yet the processes of social differentiation and economic power still play a not inconsiderable role even within the most private seeming environment of one's home. Nevertheless, wallpaper still functions as a sign of the private, intimate, familial and often female gendered space. This is in opposition to the public, representational 'masculine' space of offices, meeting rooms and debating chambers.

Robertson reinforces this allusion to the private and feminine not only by transferring the ornamental wallpaper print to the tactile textile surface. He also adopts embroidery for the next step of the creation of his piece. Conventionally, embroidery is regarded as a feminine activity. Yet, Robertson fuses references to both femininity and masculinity by using this predominantly feminine, decorative craft to stitch the imagery of weaponry, as found in different parts of the house, on to the wallpaper designs.<sup>9</sup> At one level, in the context of Traquair, the reference to the public, masculine enterprise of war and physical combat, even as a sport, is a reminder of the precarious historical position of the house with regard to internal and external threats, whether this refers to its location in the contested borderland between Scotland and England or its affiliation with the Jacobite cause. At another level, Robertson's intervention prompts us to consider some of the particular 'ingredients' which help to construct both general and more specific

versions of history and heritage, the private and the public, male and female identity.

Robertson's merging of the commercial print with the craft of embroidery is noteworthy in another respect. Both have conventionally been regarded as belonging in the non-high art realm. Furthermore, he mixes the 'ready-made' or pre-fabricated imagery of the wallpaper print with the hand-crafted and authentic mode of stitching. However, in art practice of the last forty or more years boundaries between so-called 'high' and 'low' art have been either deliberately disregarded or ostensibly employed to undermine the very same boundaries and the marginalisation that was affiliated with them. The same applies to the different values attached to commercial or ready-made imagery or objects as opposed to those originating purely in the artist's imagination.

Robertson's methods are furthermore interesting in the context of expanded printmaking. His adoption of commercial imagery in form of wallpaper is an instance of art's embrace of popular, commercial imagery since Pop art. His mixing of different modes of image making, such as drawing by means of embroidery on to the flat print involves, as with Douglas, a heightening of the 'tactility' of a print. This occurs through the comparatively three-dimensional texture and lively presence of the yarn. If at one end of the spectrum, prints become flatter through digitisation and are often looked at and encountered on the relatively immaterial computer screen, in Robertson's piece the loss of physical presence is restored by the creation of such a conspicuous surface and object.<sup>10</sup> As with Douglas, the visceral effect and pleasure of Robertson's installation complements our involvement with new technologies in everyday life and affords insights, enjoyment and emotional responses which are specific to the material form of the piece.

### **Nicola Murray**

Nicola Murray has reverted to the most simple yet, in her case, also highly sophisticated printing technique of using direct stamping. Like the wood cut, this oldest and most basic printing technique is a relief process. The lines that are to be printed are cut in

such a way that they stand proud off the non-printable background. This is in contrast to etching or engraving where the lines that are to be printed are incised into a plate. At its most humble, printing by stamping recalls children's potato printing. But, many bureaucratic procedures of states and institutions still use stamping as a sign of official approval. On the opposite end of the social spectrum, furtive printing through stamping, as a secret political weapon, still occurs, although today it has largely been replaced by sprayed graffiti.

Secrecy seems to have shaped a large part of Traquair's history. Murray's playful intervention is through a veritable game of seeking what the artist has hidden. By employing security ink which is invisible in normal light, Murray engages each viewer in a highly performative action of making visible the imagery which has been stamped on the walls of the garden pavilion with the help of special UV torches. Moreover, as in a detective story, exposure only happens piecemeal. Each blue light torch, due to safety guidelines, only ever illuminates a small patch of wall. Hence there is a palpable sense of discovery, which is increased by the gleaming white-blue, fluorescent colour on the wall. What the viewer 'uncovers' are patterns or swarms of a variety of life-sized species of moths. These have been chosen by the artist for their specific symbolic value and frequent occurrence in objects on display in Traquair as well as their general emblematic role. Murray, as a trained biologist, incorporates up-to-date biological research into the project by representing not only species which actually populate the habitat around Traquair but their proportionate depiction also reflects the frequency of their occurrence. In this way, a link is made between the risk to life symbolised by the insect historically and the current environmental threat to indigenous wild life through overfarming and climate change.

The seeming simplicity of Murray's method belies a complex and laborious process of image-making. Digital on-line images which are already reproductions of historical printed imagery, usually engravings, are printed and re-drawn by hand. Here, the historical process of drawing from life first and printing second is reversed: Individual

insects are hand-drawn not from life but from reproduced natural history illustrations. Why such a complication? Do artists nowadays not frequently appropriate and use existing imagery from the mass media, books or the internet without necessarily changing it, in recognition of the importance and prevalence of such images in our lives? There are practical reasons why certain corrections to the 'original' are necessary. In order for the complex engraved lines of the printed 'original' to create a satisfactory image that can be read in its stamped, illuminated form, the illustration has to be simplified. But Murray's intermediate re-drawing procedure also re-invests the 'mechanical' image with a tactility that is affiliated with the hand. This shows itself in the variable line that we associate with the direct involvement of the artist rather than a perfectly smooth, machine-like mark of the engraving. Yet, this process is undone by the manufacture of a stamp, a matrix in fact, from which issue multiple reproductions.

Consider how the multiplying ability of even the most basic print technique provokes reactions in us that are similar to the ones that attach to objects in our mass-produced environment. We love the abundance that mass production delivers while fearing and rejecting the sameness and excess that are equally its condition. High art at certain points in its modern history was held to present a counter point to industry's mass production due to its uniqueness, originality and authenticity. Art of the last fifty years has, by contrast, embraced the multiplication of our mass-produced environment. But the conflicting reactions of both appeal and rejection still hover. Such ambivalent feelings may be intensified in Murray's site-specific piece by the invasion-like application of the imagery in the Pavilion. After all, fascination and disgust are the most typical responses that insects habitually draw from us.

By her use of security ink which has to be made visible with extra effort on part of the viewer, Murray, like Colvin, complicates the process of seeing – something that we usually do automatically. In this way the artist compels visitors to re-enact symbolically the clandestine tactics of surreptitious deciphering of words, images and gestures that members of the Traquair family and their supporters had to adopt at various points in

history to ensure their survival. Besides, there is a nod to the involuntary surveillance to which all members of the public are now exposed in public spaces as on the internet and which they themselves are able to exert to some extent, too.

By combining the surprise of the unexpected, the mildly threatening as well as the wondrous with a disturbance of a polite and charming interior, Murray introduces a wide range of associations, physical and affective reactions. If, historically as now, print and by extension 'printed matter' on the internet, has served both dominant groups and individuals in exerting political, religious, economic, social and cultural power as well as rebels to further their cause, Murray's installation is a tangible demonstration of its subtler and poetic, if no less potent or ideological, workings.

### **David Faithfull**

The keyword that sums up David Faithfull's interventions or 'additions' to objects at Traquair is the word 'multiple'. This is 'multiple' in the sense of 'many', 'numerous' or 'various' which is its meaning more often than not in everyday language. But in the art context, the term 'multiple' applies more specifically to a particular mode of artistic production, namely the creation of, often small, objects or printed items in an edition, that is, in a specified quantity, rather than as an individual, unique piece of art. Since one of the key feature of print is its reproductive capacity, the making of multiples could be said to be characteristic of it since its invention. However, the concept of the multiple is more specifically associated with and has become popular through art practices since the 1960s. Artists' multiples gain their popularity from the fact that they are relatively low-cost, usually easily transportable, even in the post, and can reach a broader audience than an individual work of art. Therefore they suit a more egalitarian concept of art that attempted and still aims to overcome the elitism and exclusivity of the singular precious art object. Not only do multiples often consist of artists' books or other small printed items, they also correspond with printmaking's powerful and on-going tradition of collaboration and accessible art making, as in the notion and existence of an open-access workshop such as Edinburgh Printmakers. Faithfull has been working in this

tradition for some time.<sup>11</sup> In the future we are even promised the production of 3d multiples by means of so-called 3d-printing. In time, it is suggested that virtually all our household goods, including spare parts, can be made on our own 3d printers. 3d printing is also the focus of artistic research and experimentation, as was shown in the 2010 exhibition *3D 2D - Object and Illusion in Print*, at Edinburgh Printmakers, curated by Paul Thirkell. The exhibition showed work created at the Centre for Fine Print Research at the University of the West of England in Bristol.

This is the broader context for Faithfull's two- and three-dimensional printed objects at Traquair. Moreover, Faithfull is utilising the latest technology of 3d printing for one set of his multiples, namely the figures of a chess board.

Iconographically, that is in terms of allusions and symbolic imagery, his intricate interventions draw on the numerous indirect as well as obvious symbolic references to the Stuart cause throughout Traquair. He 'reshuffles' them in various associative combinations and physical formats, even quite literally as a deck of cards. Historically, the commercial prospects of the mass production of playing cards, as well as devotional images, were the driving forces of the technical and economic development of European printing processes in the fifteenth century. Hence, Faithfull alerts us to the fact that play or what we call 'leisure time' now is never only simply that but is crucially embedded in economic, political, social and even religious practices and beliefs.

The artist provides his own printed 'map' or key to his interventions presented within an artist's book which formally imitates a historical book from Traquair. In addition to their particular role of providing an instrument or tool of discovery and orientation to detect Faithfull's often subtle interventions into objects and spaces at Traquair, the actual map as well as the book can be understood metaphorically. Printed books, maps and documents can be used to disseminate and enforce ideology and control from above. However, they can equally permit those who contradict authority and power to resist and navigate alternative routes and ways of living.



Faithfull also playfully repeats the power of symbols in a manner with which we are all too familiar, namely as the Jacobite logo on Traquair's legendary beer bottles and delivery van. This particular intercession, executed by up-to-date commercial printing processes, recalls the earliest function of the screen printing process, now used artistically, but until its adoption by Pop artists such as Warhol in the 1960s almost exclusively employed commercially to print labels for mass products. In this way, Faithfull draws our attention to the role of everyday phenomena, such as packaging, with their carefully and appealingly designed graphic printed features which serve to shape personal as well as national identity, even if it means - just buying a bottle of beer. Some might argue, although to others it may seem overstating the case, that our consumption habits, mediated through printed text and imagery, not unlike the historical politics of Traquair, are a matter of (future) life and death.

### **Calum Colvin**

Colvin asks viewers to descend into the cellar of the house. While some of the vaulted rooms of the basement with their display of domestic historical household goods are part of the usual route for visitors, Colvin obliges the audience to adopt a voyeuristic and clandestine viewing position. Hereby he refers, first of all, to the history of secrecy affiliated with the house due to the Jacobite sympathies of the family. In fact, Colvin forces the visitor to playfully re-enact a posture of secrecy, of surreptitious looking, including the danger of being found out, to be shamed or worse. Implied is the uncertainty of whether the surveyor may also be the one who is being surveyed. In addition to the specific resonance in the context of Traquair, with this move Colvin, similar to Murray, complicates an action that we take for granted on an everyday level: the seemingly straightforward act of seeing and thereby what and how we see. As John Berger has famously pointed out, what we see is affected by what we know and believe. This becomes even more difficult in the case of images. There has been a lot of debate in recent art history as to what images can show and what not. That images have great power is beyond question, but what is it that we see when we look at images? What do

they show and what do they hide, or better, what are they unable to picture?

The present installation is an instance of Colvin's constant probing of vision and the means of its representation, that is, the formal, technical and aesthetic processes that are used to fashion an image. Its particular historical references notwithstanding the installation forces viewers to engage in constructing the image for themselves. The installation is thus a kind of blueprint for and of the artist's usual medium of production, which is photography. The viewer has to assemble the different components of the display, with their amalgamation of sculpture, painting, museum-like display, their multiple visual overlays of illumination and shadow through complex lighting, their myriad cultural references from both high and 'low' art and culture, both historical and contemporary, into a satisfying visual illusion. The obvious and striking way in which Colvin's photographs are 'made up', flies in the face of traditional associations of photography with realism and objectivity. His pieces could be described as three-dimensional collages, or indeed, prints. This collage character bears a strong similarity to print processes, as already discussed. Be that as it may, the installation conceived as a 3d print, as well as the usual end result of such an installation, namely the photograph, are both, in Colvin's case characterised by the fact that they declare rather than hide their artifice.<sup>12</sup>

Colvin's work has long engaged in questions around Scottish history and identity, employing his own particular approach to subject matter and media. His focus on Charles Stuart, one of the most prominent historical visitors to Traquair, lends itself to such questions which are of special significance and interest in the current political climate. Nevertheless, Colvin's reflections on Scottish history are beyond any particular party politics and the reading of history to suit the matters of the day, especially in relation to an often problematic and exclusionary notion of Scottish identity. His complex artistic manoeuvres and erudite references can be read as a metaphor for the construction, the 'collaging', of history itself, thereby asking us to be vigilant as to which version of history is presented to us, by whom and to whose gain.

Colvin's sympathetic, if wry look at questions of national identity in the context of Traquair is underpinned by situating his work in the cellar. Of course, the space of the cellar has played an important role in Freud's ideas of the unconscious. If the top of the house is associated with the rational mind, the cellar represents the unconscious. Similarly, Bachelard in his philosophical musings on space, affiliates the attic with rationality and the basement with the irrational. Is there any more warning needed?

### **Rachel Maclean**

Maclean's irreverent, parodic re-enactments on video mix or 'mash up' the factual, such as political speech, with romanticised, fictionalised versions of history and contemporary culture and politics, be they encountered in the context of the media, such as the movies and television, or through tourism and the heritage industry. Nonetheless, her luridly seductive and at times teasingly repellent imagery and performances, with their ample references, appear to belie the work's intellectual and aesthetic sophistication and disguise its serious intent. MacLean explodes any hint of a piously staunch, or agreeably comforting pull of certain historical narratives that too conveniently eliminate the complexities and contradictions of Scotland's past and present. Her piece at Traquair undermines any romantic projections or fatal nostalgia vis a vis Scotland's (and Traquair's) identity to serve an unproblematically conceived present or future.

In formal terms, the artist usually offers a mix n'match of genres, art forms, narrative conventions and dizzying references from high and low culture, family and leisure pursuits, both historical and contemporary, such as tableaux vivants, parlour games, TV chat shows or news and artists' performances. MacLean's video for Traquair is more tautly composed and narratively constructed than some of her previous work, yet her method of a wide-ranging and non-hierarchical melange of high and low, the serious and the silly, the historical and the contemporary, fact and fiction persists. In this way MacLean brings into focus the profuse and contradictory elements of everyday life and culture in the early twenty-first century. This is true, even when the audience may not be

familiar with every element of Maclean's references. In pursuit of our everyday activities, we hear Bach while shopping for frozen peas (or 'Scottish' beef), or the offerings of the latest boy- or girl band while talking with a friend about their cancer diagnosis over a skinny latte.

While Maclean, just as Logue and Colvin, does not employ printmaking techniques, the work's method of montage and collage resembles such processes. Similar to Colvin's still photography, Maclean's filmic layering or montaging (most evident in the fact that she is the only actor even in scenes which involve two protagonists) corresponds to print processes whether they be colour etching or screen print with its multiple levels.<sup>13</sup>

The work's satirical character ties it to a long history of print as a vital factor of cultural opposition, play and subversion. As mentioned, the earliest popular European wood cuts were of playing cards. Devotional flyers were matched by those questioning the political and religious status quo. More specifically print is affiliated with the satirical, often political cartoon and caricature which characterised visual culture, especially in 18th century Britain, as exemplified by the works of Hogarth and Rowlandson. In addition to the sardonic ethos of MacLean's video, elements of the period costume of some of the characters, albeit 'corrupted' by more recent signs and symbols, as well as the setting at Traquair visually serve to create the link.

Parody is the tool of MacLean's satirical wit. Parody can be compared to the principle of montage. It works by imitating an existing, well-known style or genre or other recognisable procedures. It does so by re-presenting or re-using them in an obviously 'false' context or manner. This may or may not entail ridicule. In either case, the 're-contextualisation' serves to disrupt any habitual associations with the image, process, visual appearance or action. In MacLean's video the voices of well-known contemporary public figures emerge from ostensibly fabricated theatrical scenarios, further underlined by metaphorical actions. Set against the 'real' historical background of Traquair, word and image, speech and action, fact and fiction, past and present are combined at the

same time as they are being set on a collision course with each other. This potent mix demands of the viewer to probe their pre-conceptions and query their own allegiances .

MacLean's at times almost anarchic DIY method, at the level of imagery, props and seemingly eclectic and at times paradoxical range of references is notable for its 'texture'.<sup>14</sup> While carefully set up and professionally edited, her imagery and narrative with their clash of the real versus the artificial present a striking counterpoint to the ever-increasing slickness and perfection of technology, media and advertising in the creation of 'reality' at every level of contemporary life. In French media theorist Jean Baudrillard's words, this results in the fabrication of the 'hyperreal'. The hyperreal, contrary to the word's common understanding, is not 'unreal' but something that is seemingly 'more real than the real'. Against this backdrop, Maclean's procedures entail a vivid reflection and de-construction of the mediatisation processes that are involved in the production of what we consider to be real, such as 'history' and identity, both personal and national. Furthermore, they involve a strong self-awareness as to her own performance as an aesthetic, even political event.

Just as the characters in Maclean's neo-narrative video with their 'constantly shifting and mutable identities' (MacLean), artistic media and disciplines are not fixed either. This applies even to something as hands-on and technically demanding as printmaking.

## **Conclusion**

The artists' interventions at Traquair have allowed a consideration of what an expanded notion of prints and printmaking can entail today. Besides, the emphasis on the idea of 'print' in the reflection on the different strategies and outcomes of these seven artists opens out a distinct layer of meaning. This applies both to the works themselves, as well as in more general terms, to the 'idea' of print, even if the work itself does not directly engage in the specific conventions of printmaking.

The layering of image construction that is so typical of the print but also in some

installation practices, such as Colvin's or with MacLean's video/film image, is an apt metaphor for the artifice of art. In contemporary philosophical thinking, such layering constitutes a metaphor of life itself, namely in the construction of history and identities, both at a personal and national level. In this respect the artists' strategies and the explicit or implied reference to print also corresponds to the role of Traquair as a historical site in the local, national and international context.

Print can be understood as an actual technique, or as a material artistic practice which encompasses multiple and differently complex techniques, but print as imprint is also a facet of embodied existence. Our bodies constantly leave traces or imprints. By the same token they are themselves (im)printed upon. In addition to such actual, largely invisible imprints, the notion of 'print' can also be understood as a metaphor. In its broadest sense what the artists have done is to create 'imprints' in our memory, imagination and ideas. Aside from the specific, even if expanded nature of print in some of the artists' work, the idea of print here functions as a metaphor of our experience of being in Traquair's spaces, their physical feel and texture, their inter-relationship with the past, present and even the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Auslander, Leora, and others, 'AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture', *American Historical Review*, 114.5 (2009), p 1372. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6tm448d> [accessed 30/April/2012]

<sup>2</sup> Katie Chavez (2005) *Site-Specific Performance at Historic Sites. Resources, Bibliography and Examples*. P 11 Available at <http://tinyurl.com/885le2s> [accessed 28/April/2012]

<sup>3</sup> Gilliam McIver (2004) ART/SITE/CONTEXT. Available at: <http://www.sitespecificart.org.uk/6.htm> [accessed 16/April/2012]

<sup>4</sup> 'A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained' The Free Online Dictionary available at: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/matrix> [accessed 15/May/2012]

<sup>5</sup> José Roca, the curator of the 2009/10 International Printmaking exhibition Philagrafika 2009-2010 in Philadelphia, USA: 'And, for the sake of consistency, we considered a print anything that had three components: a matrix, a transfer medium, and a receiving surface. It can be plate, ink and paper; it can also be a digital file, laser-cut vinyl, and the walls and floors of the exhibition space. Or a silkscreen, charcoal dust, and water. The matrix stores the necessary information to reproduce; the medium transfers the information, and the support receives it.' Roca (2010) 'Prints, or Contemporary Art?', published in *Working States*, available at: <http://www.philagrafika.org/pdf/WS/printsorcontemporaryart.pdf> [accessed 15/April/2012]

<sup>6</sup> As stated earlier in the essay, in printmaking the matrix is the plate or stone or screen with the image drawn or fabricated by the artist; in the case of casting the matrix is the three-dimensional 'original' object which is traditionally made by the artist, in clay or wax, or, as in Logue's case, bought or borrowed.

<sup>7</sup> Haptic - Of or relating to the sense of touch; tactile. The Free Online Dictionary available at: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/matrix> [accessed 15/May/2012]

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<sup>8</sup> As one example of the persistence, alongside the digital, of more hands-on material practices, see the rise in the sale (and use) of fountain pens, reported in the media.

<sup>9</sup> The combination of the ornamental imagery of wallpaper and the genteel method of needlepoint with motifs and symbols which appear diametrically opposed to both the look of the printed support and the medium of creating the imagery is reminiscent of another print project, namely Glasgow based artists' duo Timorous Beasties' 'Toile'. 'Toile' is the term for an eighteenth century French fabric and the surface decoration printed onto it. Timorous Beasties mixed the historical, often neo-classical, refined toile de jouy format, consisting of decorative repeat patterns with insets of pastoral scenes, with well-known city landmarks and imagery from the urban underbelly, such as drug addiction, homelessness and so on. See their project for the 2009 Edinburgh Festival publicity on the festival's web page: <http://2009.eif.co.uk/edinburgh-toile> [accessed 23/May/2012] and on the artists' web site: [http://www.timorousbeasties.com/project/edinburgh\\_toile/](http://www.timorousbeasties.com/project/edinburgh_toile/) [accessed 19/May/2012].

<sup>10</sup> A similar hands-on approach which emphasises the tactility of media, their concrete materiality as opposed to on-screen surface/superficiality can be observed in the practice of many artists who employ printmaking. They also incorporate traditional techniques into 3d installations or new technologies. To name but a few: Indonesian art collective Tromarama employ coarsely executed wood cut in the creation of their animated films; Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie carves his archaic scripts into barely set concrete for his use of the ancient technique of ink rubbing; Farniyaz Zaker screenprints fragments on hand woven rugs.

<sup>11</sup> See *Inkubator*, Faithfull's highly successful curation of a touring exhibition (2007-10) of artists' books in collaboration with Edinburgh Printmakers.

For his Traquair project Faithfull even collects his multiple interventions in form of an 'Über-Multiple', namely a box which contains samples of all the individual items. In this respect he follows the influential example of Marcel Duchamp and his creation of his *Green Box* (1934) (edition of 320 copies). Not only did each box contain miniature sized replicas of all his works to date but also painstakingly printed 'facsimiles' (Duchamp) of his notes. See Ecke Bonk (1989) *Marcel Duchamp, the portable museum : the making of the Boîte-en-valise ... inventory of an edition*. London: Thames and Hudson.

<sup>12</sup> If prints were the first and major technology that allowed audiences to see beyond what we directly perceive around us, then photography intensified and expanded this possibility of seeing more than what we can directly experience or what is existentially possible, as Roland Barthes notably stated. Photography shares with prints the existence of the invisible matrix (the paper or celluloid negative in analogue; the digital file in digital photography), a transfer medium (enlarger and chemical developer) and a receiving surface, namely the photographic print. Like the art print, whether etching, lithograph or screen print, the finished photograph implies an absence, namely the matrix from which it originated. This and the process of layering which is implied in the coming-into-existence of the printed or photographic image becomes an apt metaphor of the complexities of seeing itself.

<sup>13</sup> The so-called 'green screen' method employed by MacLean implies the filming of one part of the final image against a green screen. In a second step, the elements of the image that appear in green are replaced by another partial image which fits it perfectly, such as background or scenery. In this way, the 'montage' of different clips of footage which is part of any film making process becomes more pronounced although this is not evident to the viewer.